

EXPLORING SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

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The First Saturday in June is National Trails Day

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The goals of National Trails Day are to promote public awareness and appreciation for America's trails and to build partnerships among trail users, businesses and public land managers. Southwest Virginia's trails are an excellent example of what can be accomplished when local residents, businesses and officials at the federal, state and local levels work together in aid of a common purpose.

National Trails Day is also a time to promote hiking, biking and backpacking as some of the best forms of exercise. Due to a strong commitment at the federal, state and local levels, our region is now home to an extensive network of trails which offer residents throughout Southwest Virginia an excellent opportunity for exercise. To promote the use of trails for exercise, I have become a cosponsor of H.R. 4722, the Active Community Transportation Act. The measure would provide grants to communities that develop trails to encourage a shift to physically active transportation such as bicycling and walking.

Our region's trails also benefit our region's growing tourism economy. The creation of new jobs for Southwest Virginia is my highest priority, and our region's network of trails affords residents with new and greater economic opportunities. Trails bring increased visitation to our communities with attendant economic benefits for our region's small businesses, offering entrepreneurs more opportunities to develop and expand tourism related businesses. Trails such as the Virginia Creeper Trail, which extends 33 miles from Abingdon to the North Carolina State Line, bring thousands of tourists to our region and have encouraged the development of small businesses such as bike rentals, restaurants and outfitters.

Several trail projects are underway throughout the Ninth District as a result of federal funding which has been provided at my request. For example, recently I joined Henry County officials in breaking ground on a new phase of the Smith River Trail System, a network of walking and biking trails that will eventually extend from Philpott Dam, through the towns of Bassett and Fieldale, to the City of Martinsville. Construction is now underway on a passage extending 4.5 miles from Collinsville through Martinsville with the benefit of \$400,000 in federal funds granted at my request and funding from the Virginia Tobacco Commission. The new trail will extend along the scenic Smith River, and future phases could reach Philpott Lake. I look forward to marking the completion of this passage of the Smith River Trail system later this year.

National Trails Day offers a special opportunity to all Southwest Virginians to enjoy our region's outdoor experience, and I encourage residents to join me in making use of our region's trails this Summer.

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